No. 7

The REDEMPTION of Marie Gordon

THE TRAGIC STORY OF WRONGED WOMANHOOD

Price 10¢

IT WAS a gesture which expressed impatience and his feeling of utter contempt. In fact, he could not understand how this woman, who had so basely deceived and betrayed him, dared to speak of having any right in his house. For a long moment he stared at her in incredulous silence. He wondered if he had heard aright.

"Did I understand you to say that you claim the right to—to see my children?" he demanded.

"Please do not forget that they are my children as well as yours," she replied as she drew herself up with a mother's dignity. "It was I who brought them into the world. You can not deny me the right to see them. You can't——"

Again he stopped her with the same gesture of utter contempt.

"I—I didn't think you had the nerve," he said hoarsely. "How dare you enter this house and pollute it with your presence?"

She tossed her head rebelliously. She did not understand him.

"I told you before I did not come back to quarrel with you, Phil. I have every right to see my children, and you can't prevent it."

"Can't I?" His short laugh was terrifying. "Well, you won't see them to-day nor at any other time so long as I am able to prevent it. You have ceased to exist so far as they are concerned. You forfeited that right when you——"

"When I left it was because I caught you hugging and kissing Alice Procter," she interrupted. "Yes, that is why I left this house. Oh, you can have her. I won't put a straw in your way. Divorce me and marry her. But the children are mine."

Philip Gordon advanced a step. He was breath-

ing hard. He had a secure hold on his self-control.

"I know you saw me in the pavillion that night with Alice," he said with forced quietness. "What happened there was not my doing. I was not a willing part to it. But was that unfortunate scene conclusive evidence for you that I am in love with Alice Procter?

"As God is my witness, Marie," he raised a hand solemnly, "I have never wronged you even in thought. I loved you as no other man could love his wife. I have slaved almost day and night to be able to give you all the comforts and luxuries I felt you were entitled to."

Chapter 25

HOMELESS.

PHILIP GORDON, as he finished speaking, seemed less angry. In fact every word of his last speech had been uttered in a tone of complaint. About his lips lingered just a small vestige of that old tenderness, and the expression in his eyes was almost that of an aggrieved child. But an instant later wrath, uncontrollable and fierce, blazed up in him anew. Again he assailed her in the most bitter terms. Marie was becoming alarmed at his increasing violence.

She retreated before him until she found herself touching the table. It gave her the needed physical support.

Her face had turned crimson. Her pulses were flying. A powerful conviction that her husband's words were true; that her own blind jealousy had been utterly mistaken and unfounded, was forcing its way into her brain.

It was a crushing revelation, and she saw now the full measure of her offense against him.

Following a lamentable delusion she had deserted Phil and the children. In a moment of madness she had written that note in which she hinted at divorce. And worse than that, she had signified her willingness to agree to this divorce so he might marry Alice Procter.

Marie saw her hideous mistake. Surely, it was not yet too late to rectify it. Philip had always been amenable to reason.

"I—I was wrong," she admitted in a breath. Then

her voice rose. "Phil—Phil, please forgive me," she pleaded. "I know you were not to blame. I know you are guiltless. But you see, I believed the worst, and the thought that I had lost you, maddened me. I was out of my mind. I was crazed by jealousy when I left you and our babies."

She paused for breath, then went on more rapidly:

"You and I were so happy together until—until Alice Procter came between us. I believed that you cared for her. Oh, it made me so miserable, Phil. I can't tell you how utterly wretched I was. I bitterly repent my hasty act. I had no right to do what I did. Take me back, dear—take me back to your heart, and I'll make amends—indeed I will. Oh, I am so sorry." The last words trailed off in a sob and she sank upon her knees.

Philip Gordon stood before his wife as if petrified, his eyes riveted on her upturned face. Ah, how he had loved this woman! And he still loved her. How beautiful—how entrancingly beautiful she was in her anguish and despair.

But how could a woman be so beautiful and yet so false? How dared she ask him to forgive her when she had committed an unpardonable sin?

He drew away from her with a gesture of contempt.

"Get up!" he commanded harshly. "Get up."

Marie struggled to her feet and stood with bowed head.

"It is so easy to ask to be forgiven," he went on, unutterable pain in his voice. "Yes, it is so easy. But you are asking more than I can give. You know why, for you have made me hate you."

"Phil—Phil!" she cried, desperate, "you don't

mean that. I would rather you'd kill me than hear you say that you hate me. What have I done?"

"What have you done?" he repeated with an ugly laugh. "You ask me that when your own guilty conscience must accuse you? But I'll tell you. In your unreasonable jealousy you sought to get even with me. You deserted your home, me, and the children to run away with a skunk like Jack Hoover.

"That is what you have done," he flung at her viciously. "Go back to him, for I am through with you forever. You are not fit to be a decent man's wife. You are absolutely unfit to be a mother."

She recoiled as if struck by a physical blow. For a moment she was unable to make a sound. Her wildly dilating eyes told of her intense mental suffering.

Then, at last, a groan wrung itself from her tortured breast.

"Don't—don't say that!" she cried passionately. "Don't accuse me of running away with Hoover to get even with you, Phil. It is not true. Oh, God, it is more than I can bear!"

Gordon laughed grimly—contemptuously.

"Do you deny that you met Hoover on the train bound for Cincinnati?" he demanded. "Do you deny that?"

"I can not deny it, Phil."

"And didn't you travel in his company all the way to your destination? Didn't you?" the husband went on, his fury increasing.

"Not all the way to my destination," Marie denied. "He wanted to, but I would not permit it. I made him leave me when the train reached the Grand Central Station in Cincinnati."

"Oh, did you?" he sneered. "Well, I happen to know better. Perhaps you would not have been quite

so daring had you known that someone who knew you and Hoover, watched you. You wouldn't have allowed him to make love to you in the car. You wouldn't have tolerated his arm around you."

Marie was dumbfounded.

"He didn't make love to me, and he didn't have his arm around me!" she protested shrilly. "Whoever told you that lied maliciously."

"The man who saw you in a most compromising position with Hoover would not stoop to a lie," Phil returned. "He is one of my most valued and trusted friends. He is known for his absolute honesty and integrity. I would not hesitate to believe anything he says. Tom Atkinson is the most truthful man I know."

She turned away in despair, and a sob rose to her lips.

"Phil," she entreated, "you are making the same dreadful mistake I made. You are taking something for granted that it untrue. I swear to you——"

"Don't!" he broke in. "You haven't even a rag of a reputation to swear by. All of our friends know that you ran off with Hoover. Your affair with him has become public property. The sentence of the world has already been passed on you, and so has mine."

Marie raised her hands.

"For God's sake, give me a chance," she begged piteously. "To the meanest criminal is given a chance to defend himself. If I were to die within the next hour I must tell you this: meeting Jack Hoover on the train was an accident. He could tell you that, if he will. He sat with me, that is true, but not because I invited him."

She had been speaking rapidly and found herself suddenly out of breath. Trying hard to get a new grip on her senses, she went on:

"He was nice to me, I'll admit. But he remained

a gentleman all the way. When we arrived in Cincinnati, he insisted upon accompanying me to the home of my aunt. I wouldn't have it, and told him so in plain words. Now that is all there is to it. Everything I have told you is true as God is my witness."

Phil Gordon, his hands linked behind his back, turned abruptly and began pacing the floor.

When he faced his wife again he seemed to be trembling.

"Very well," he exclaimed, his fury unabated, "supposing I felt inclined to believe your story that far —which I don't, how can you explain your lengthy absence? Where did you stay all that while? Not at your aunt's, for she is away. You did not even call at her home. What hotel did your lover select for you?

"What—what hotel did my lover select for me?"

"That's exactly what I am asking you," Gordon returned. "Where did you stay with him?"

Marie's mouth stood agape.

At first she thought she had not heard him right. Then the full import of the vile insinuation shot through her. The sudden flash in her eyes disconcerted Phil for a moment.

"Do you—do you mean to say that I spent the nights in a Cincinnati hotel with Hoover?" she queried, her voice coming with an effort.

"Well, didn't you?" he countered. "Didn't you?"

"And you think me capable of that, Phil?" Her voice was almost a whisper now. "Do you, Phil? Answer me."

It was a frightful accusation to make for Gordon.

He would never have done it had his mind been normal. But inflamed as it was, with fierce jealousy, he made no attempt to control the vicious trend of his thoughts nor speech.

And now he said something he was bound to regret for the rest of his life.

"A married woman who deliberately allows a man other than her husband to make love to her in a train is fit for anything," he said. "You did that."

Marie was wringing her hands in silent agony. She saw how useless it was to try to convince her husband.

She bowed her head, sobbing.

Phil was watching her narrowly. Her attitude was one of silent acquiescence rather than revolt. And he believed that she was giving up the fight because she was guilty.

"Now let me tell you something," he went on with a sharp intake of his breath. "I have been very patient with you. I have not forgotten that picture episode which cost me a round five thousand. I wanted to believe what you told me and I gave you the benefit of my doubt. You promised me faithfully that you would never again tolerate Hoover near you.

"What did you do?" His voice rose with renewed anger. "You thought you had something on me when you saw Alice Procter make a fool of herself and kissed me in the pavillion that night. Crazy to get even, you left this house and took a train for Cincinnati. You can't make me believe that your meeting with Hoover was accidental. It couldn't have been."

"But it was!" she protested vehemently.

He laughed bitterly.

"And I suppose Hoover's arm around you on the train was accidental too. And when he became your escort when you reached Cincinnati, that was accidental. And, I suppose, every other of your questionable acts was purely accidental and quite innocent. Well, I was a fool for ever believing anything you said."

A sudden flush mantled her cheeks, then disappeared, leaving them ghastly white.

"You seem to forget that I caught you in a base lie," Gordon broke the momentary silence. "You are trying to make me believe that you went to visit your aunt. You did nothing of the kind. And no doubt you had your fill of licentiousness while you were away

"I wonder why you came back at all. I suppose this Hoover made it so pleasant——"

"Stop!" Marie's hands were raised—not in supplication, but in a wrath that made her shiver from head to foot. "Do—do you realize what you are saying, Phil? You have consigned me to the level of the lowest streetwalker, me, the mother of your children."

"I have placed you where you belong," he returned quickly. "And I don't propose to mince any more words with you. There is no excuse for a mother who abandons her children for a lover. You are guilty as hell. And believe me, you are not going to get possession of the children when we are divorced. No court or jury would turn them over to you after what happened."

His cruel words which destroyed every vestige of hope stabbed her to the heart.

Marie stood like one paralyzed. Unutterable despair was depicted in her features. Never for a moment had she thought that Phil would go to this extreme.

"Take everything away from me," she moaned passionately, "but not my babies. Take them away from me, and the consequences will be on your head."

His laugh was terrible.

"Oh, that is a threat, is it? Well, you'll get a chance to make good. But first of all relieve me of your presence. Get out of this house, and never darken its doors again."

He strode across the room, unlocked the door and

flung it open. His finger pointed steadily, and there was a dangerous fire in his eyes.

Marie was frightened, and she was desperate. Surely Phil could not be cruel enough to bid her go without seeing the children. She moved toward the door mechanically.

In the corridor she paused and glanced furtively in the direction of the nursery. Then she ran.

"Don't you think it!" His voice, low and tense, was close to her ears. "You are not going to touch them with your filthy hands. Come on, and don't offer any resistance."

It was useless to evade him, although she tried it.

"Get out of my house at once!" he shouted.

She fought to get away from her husband's grip, but her strength gave way.

"Phil—Phil!" she begged pitifully. "For God's sake, have a heart. Please let me see my babies. If you don't, I'll die. I won't stay long. Just let me kiss them once, and I'll leave your house."

"No!" he hissed, apparently beside himself.

Marie was too weak to scream. She found it difficult even to get her breath as she was being forced down the stairs.

Not until the cool night air struck her throbbing temples, and she stood alone in the darkness, did she utter a sound.

"God—help me!" she gasped, and leaned dizzily against the side of the house.

In the room she had just quitted, Phil was huddled in a chair. The constant shaking of his shoulders told that he was sobbing. Occasionally he glanced furtively at the door, half hoping, half fearing that Marie would come back.

"God help me!" he, too, prayed. For his soul was

"Phil — Phil!" she begged pitifully. "For God's sake, have a heart. Please let me see my babies. Just let me kiss them once, and I'll leave your house!"

torn with unspeakable anguish.

When he rose and went to the door, he staggered. The full import of what he had done, rushed over him like a flood. There was a strange light in his eyes as he turned the knob.

Swinging the door open quickly, he stared up and down the hall. A look of disappointment crossed his pasty features.

What his purpose was could be seen in his next move. He ran to the front door, staggering no longer. He was again master of himself. Perhaps it was not yet too late to undo the horrible thing he had done.

Dr. Van Buren's words were ringing in his ears.

"Whatever you do, don't lose your temper," the physician had told him. "Be just and give your wife the benefit of your doubt."

Dominated by a new resolve, Gordon reached the outside. Again disappointment smote him with its cold hand. For the figure which had been leaning against the house but a moment ago, had disappeared.

Chapter 26

AT THE STUDIO

WATERFORD BURLEY had established a splendid reputation for himself as a painter of beautiful women. Beyond that he was a question mark. No one knew anything about his past or family connections. One thing was very obvious, however; he followed his chosen profession not because of the income it brought him, for he was a rich man.

And this being the case, one is tempted to inquire why he applied himself so assidiously to painting beautiful women.

In appearance he affected the careless manner of dress found among struggling artists in the Latin quarter of Paris. At the first glance he created the impression of being near-sighted, forgetful and even stupid.

But in studying his features one would instantly have come to the conclusion that Burley was anything but that.

While he seemed indifferent he was intensely on the alert. His eyes were sharp and piercing. The thick, shell-rimmed glasses could not hide their peculiar expression.

Burley had a strangely effective way of ingratiating himself with women. His power of persuasion was almost uncanny. There was about him an air of mystery women liked to explore.

When on a wonderful Sunday morning he admitted the slightly tremulous Betty Harding to his studio, he noticed an unmistakable shade of disappoint-

ment creep over her face. He noticed how quickly her eyes searched every corner of the room, then finally met his questioningly.

He was prepared for the question she was about to ask.

"Are — are you alone?" Betty inquired, hesitating on the threshold.

"I am," he admitted, smiling blandly.

"But you told me that you had a sister living with you, and that she would be here when I came," she reminded him.

"Yes, I know," the artist said, "but my sister was called to the bedside of her favorite aunt last night. I expect her back any moment, though. Please take off your things and make yourself at home." Then it occurred to him that he did not know his pretty visitor's name. He laughed. "I don't know what to call you."

"Betty—Betty Harding," she answered. "Just call me plain Betty."

"Alright, plain Betty," he laughed again, and very pleasantly. He noticed that she made no attempt to remove her hat and wrap. Neither did she take a seat. "Really, I am sorry my sister was called away," he said hurriedly. "But I am sure she'll be back in an hour at the most. You won't mind being alone with me that long, will you?"

Betty Harding liked his frank face and his laugh. And she liked the handsomely furnished studio. It could easily be seen that this Waterford Burley was not a poor, struggling artist.

"Let me show you some of my work," he suggested. "It will help while away the time."

She removed her hat slowly and dropped her wrap from her shoulders. Burley took both and placed them on the rack near the door. Then he motioned her to

follow him on a tour of inspection through the studio.

Betty's instinctive feeling for art told her that there were both power and beauty in the paintings he showed her. And before the accumulating knowledge of his skill her coolness gradually fell away from her.

For a long time they stood before a canvass which held a dreamy-eyed girl of tender years.

The painting was in bust, with gleaming white shoulders bare. The face was one unforgettable in its expression of innocence and purity. Betty found it familiar.

Where had she seen that face before? Vainly she searched the chambers of her memory. It reminded her most forcibly of one of the girls at college, who had been a particular chum of hers. But, she concluded, it could not be, for her home was in Richmond Virginia.

"That is beautiful," she acknowledged with an involuntary catch in her breath. "Who is she?"

The artist smiled and shook his head.

"I hope you will pardon me if I refuse to give the young lady's name," he said. "She has class and poise, hasn't she?"

"Yes," agreed Betty. "She might be a young society debutante. She has Patrician features."

"She has the face of a thoroughbred," said Burley. "But she is the daughter of a poor cobbler in this city. I discoverd her in the same manner I discovered you, only not in the same place. A reproduction of this painting adorned the front cover page of one of our best magazines."

Betty accepted the explanation with certain mental reservations. She felt that he was not telling the whole truth.

They passed on, Betty becoming more and more interested. She forgot that they were alone. The artist kept up the conversation, but refrained from allowing it

to drift into a personal channel.

"This painting is that of a young Italian girl," he said as he indicated another picture in full figure. "Look at those wonderful dark eyes, and those full red lips. She represents that hot-blooded Latin type. That girl has a fortune in her face and figure if she only had the brain to make the best of her opportunities." He grinned as he added: "You see, I am always looking for true types, and when I find one, I——"

"What type am I?" Betty interrupted with one of her rare smiles.

Burley looked her over carefully for a long moment.

"You are purely Anglo-Saxon with those violet eyes and sun-kissed hair of yours," he told her. "But you are more than that, Betty. You are my ideal of an American girl. Yours is the face that inspires one. It is lovely, beyond comparison."

Betty blushed. Under ordinary circumstances she would have resented this as base flattery. But Waterford Burley was an artist and he took an artist's licence.

"I have looked long and vainly for a girl of your type," he continued with warm enthusiasm. "I have always wanted to transfer my ideal of an American girl on a canvass. Well, my dream is going to come true with your help."

"With my help, Mr. Burley?"

"Yes, with your help."

"How can I help you?" Betty asked, smiling at the intent look with which he studied her face.

"By being rather uncomfortable for a few hours," was his reply. "By sitting absolutely still in the position I am going to place you. I know you can do that if you will. May I ask that favor?"

Betty gave her consent. They approached a small

platform upon which stood a Roman chair.

The artist's face occasionally came very close to hers as he placed her properly. Then he adjusted the light by raising one window shade and partly drawing another. He viewed her critically.

"That is wonderful," he exclaimed with a sort of a gasp. "Can you hold that pose?"

"I'll try," said Betty, infested by his excitement for the first time, as he fell to blocking out his canvass. "I'll try very hard."

The artist appeared to be quite calm as he worked. Form time to time he paused to study Betty's face. Then he would lay down the brush and come over to change the pose of her head. His hand caressed her cheek as he tilted her chin.

When she announced that she was tired, he smiled and brought her a glass of very good wine and some wafers.

While they enjoyed this light lunch, they chatted animatedly. Burley had little trouble in convincing his latest model that her features were extraordinarily beautiful and that she could make a great deal of money by posing.

"My dear Betty," he exclaimed, "I wish I could tell you how happy you are making me. You are giving me something I can never pay you back for."

"But you can pay me back," she reminded him.

"How?" he asked, reaching for her hand.

"Perhaps we could make it an exchange of services," she suggested, her smile more provocative than she had intended it to be.

Burley released her hand.

"What do you mean by that?" he asked tersely.

"I mean that I want to become an artist," she told him. "And if I can help you by posing, you could give

me some instructions. Oh, you don't know how I would love it."

"Would you?" His voice was like the humming of a bee. "But where would we get a chance for that if you are engaged with other work."

"My evenings are free," Betty explained. "I could come every night and all day Sunday. Of course, I am afraid such an arrangement would not be to your liking. You don't want to be tied to your studio day and night, do you?"

He stood looking down at her without moving. It was very quiet in the room. Betty was breathing rapidly. She winced slightly when she felt his hand on her head.

"That would be wonderful," he said softly, "and I wouldn't mind it a bit. But it might be dangerous."

"Why dangerous?" she inquired innocently.

"Because my dear, you have that mysterious something which has made and unmade kings," he told her. "Your charm is rather hard to describe. I find it irresistible. You know, an artist is a human being after all. I am afraid I might find myself making love to you."

Betty blushed to the roots of her hair.

"Of course, I could not permit that, Mr. Burley. You see—you see, I am married. Couldn't we work together and be just friends?"

"Friends?" He laughed. "I don't know. But we can try it."

He went back to work with a will. For two hours Betty sat like a statue. When she left the artist seemed cool, but cordial. They agreed between them that she was to return the following evening and every evening thereafter through out the week.

As the time rolled on, Betty found it difficult to

make her eyes behave as a married woman's should. She liked Burley. She liked his earnestness and his willingness to teach her.

By degrees her attitude changed a little.

She did not resent his obvious familiarities. It pleased her indeed to hear him say that she was progressing splendidly in her work. He taught her how to mix colors to get the right effect.

He made numerous suggestions, including that of studying nature by taking automobiles rides in the open country.

During one of these, Betty fell in love with a pastoral scene. A number of cows were grazing on the green meadow, with a strip of woods in the back-ground.

"Oh, if I could only do that," she exclaimed.

"You can, my dear," he said encouragingly. "Sit down and make a sketch of the scene in black. You can work out the color scheme at the studio. I'll help you."

And Betty made a fine sketch. Her enthusiasm matched that of her tutor.

She was so engrossed in her work that she failed to pay any more attention to Burley's continued familiarities. They were drifting into a channel which led to certain shipwreck.

It happened one night after Betty had worked rather late. Burley had been watching her intently.

Betty had no inkling of his intention until she found herself suddenly in his arms, and she felt the hot breath upon her cheek. He kissed her before she could prevent it.

"Oh, you mustn't!" she gasped, her face crimson and her eyes flashing resentfully. "No—no, let me go, please."

"God help me, I couldn't resist it!" Burley cried, his voice quivering with a powerful emotion. "I know

I had no right to do that. But I love you more than you will ever know."

She drew away from him quickly.

"I—I am sorry, oh, so sorry," she whispered.

"So am I," he confessed. "But what are we going to do about it?"

"About what?" Betty asked coolly.

"My being in love with you, Betty."

"You must forget it," the latter advised, smiling. "You know I am a married woman. I want you to respect me. But how can you if I permit——"

"You are right," he broke in disappointedly and sighed.

After that they worked side by side like real pals.

Betty finished her first painting. She was overjoyed when Burley insisted upon selling it for her. One night he handed her a check for three hundred dollars.

"What for?" Betty asked in shocked surprise.

"I sold your painting to a friend of mine," the artist replied. "I am sorry I did not get more for it."

"Why, three hundred dollars is too much," she said as she fingerd the check. "I thought it was worth about twenty-five. But you must take half of it, Mr. Burley. You deserve it, for you——"

He stopped her with a gesture of dissent.

"Please do not suggest such a thing," he said with a hurt tone in his voice. "I am only too glad that I was able to help you, my dear Betty. The man who bought your painting is a well-known novelist. He has asked permission to call at the studio and meet you."

Betty's cheeks dimpled. She was not in a mood to deny anything. Besides, her mind was busy thinking what success would mean to her.

"I don't want you to be under the impression that you are under obligations to me," Burley spoke again.

"You posed for a picture that will net me thousands of dollars. Already three magazine publishers have made me offers for it. They want to use it for a cover page."

"Well, I am glad if I have been of some help to you," she murmured.

They went to work again in silence. From time to time Betty stole a glance at the artist. She was picqued that he did not pay the least attention to her.

Then suddenly the studio door was flung open and a tall handsome man strode in.

Betty did not look at him, but she was startled at the sound of his voice. The manner in which he spoke to Burley indicated that these two were old friends.

"Oh, Betty," the latter cried, "I want you to meet Mr. Carlton McLain, the famous novelist."

She turned swiftly to find herself face to face with a man who was no stranger to her. Betty's smile was a little twisted, and she held out her hand reluctantly.

"Well, I'll be hanged!" exclaimed McLain. "How do you do, young lady. I never expected to find you here. Do you remember what I told you that day we met outside of Haddon's department store? I said that you and I were bound to meet again.

"But," he looked at Burley, "you don't mean to tell me that she is one of your models."

"Indeed she is," the artist informed him. "Mrs. Harding has also been studying with me, and I——"

"You lucky dog," McLain broke in, laughing. "I suppose you have been making love to her, too. Come now, both of you are blushing. When will the wedding bells ring?"

Betty was trying to hide her confusion by averting her flushed face. Burley spoke.

"You are wrong, Carlton," he said. "Mrs. Hard-

ing already has a husband."

"What if she has?" the other retorted quickly. "That fact would not prevent a modern Don Juan, like you, from making love to her. And I can't say that I blame you. Ah, you artists are to be envied.

"You entice the most beautiful young women into your studios, pay them to pose for you, and then——"

"Your impressions are wrong in this case," Betty spoke up. "Mr. Burley did not entice me. I came of my own free will."

"So much the worse for you, young lady," the novelist answered with a peculiar laugh. "And I know you wouldn't have come if you knew his record. He is a regular heart breaker."

"Mr. Burley is a gentleman," Betty defended hotly and rather defiantly.

"Of course, he is," came back promptly. "All artists are gentlemen until the veneer rubs off."

Burley was beginning to feel very uncomfortable. He could not understand McLain's attitude nor his reason for talking the way he did. Was he deliberately trying to discredit him in Betty's eyes?

If so, what was his motive? Then he recalled the man's raving some time ago about a beautiful girl he had met on the street. She worked in Haddon's department store.

It was clear now. That girl had been Betty, and McLain had fallen in love with her at first sight.

"I suppose I beat you to it, old man," he said quietly.

"Yes, so you did," McLain responded not very pleasantly. "But that doesn't mean that I am entirely eliminated."

Betty was trying vainly to analyze her feelings. These two men were evidently taking it for granted that

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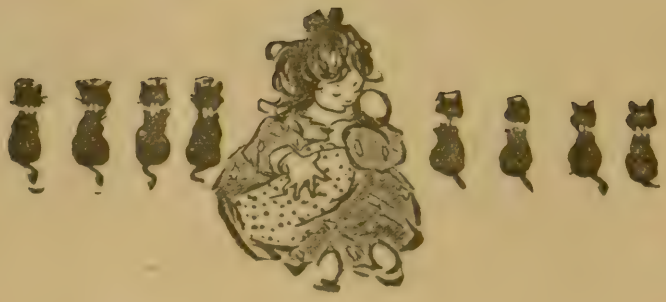
they had a perfect right to aspire to become her lovers in spite of the fact that she was a married woman. She resented it bitterly.

But her position was such that she could not offend either of them without injuring herself. One was her sponsor and the other was a famous novelist whose influence could not lightly be spurned.

But she was making a serious mistake in remaining passive to this incongruous situation. She was sowing the seed the harvest of which was destined to become a tragedy.



Chapter 27

A MOTHER'S GRIEF

KNOWING her husband as she did, Marie Gordon realized the utter hopelessness, the utter futility of going back and renewing her plea after having been forcibly ejected from the house. And she would have done it for the sake of her two babies, had not her inherent pride sternly forbidden it.

In words of scathing denunciation Philip had branded her, the mother of his children, as a woman of low moral character.

He had made it hideously plain that he believed her guilty of having spent several nights with Jack Hoover at a Cincinnati hotel.

Her pride, coupled with a feeling of bitter resentment at the unjust accusation, kept her for a time from becoming a prey to hysterical weeping. She hated her husband as much as she was capable of hating any man who had done her a grievous wrong.

And yet, how hard it was to leave the house that sheltered her tender offsprings. It did not seem possible that she had to go without being permitted to hold them once more to her bosom.

As she stood alone in the darkness, she felt a sudden tightening in her throat.

She dug both of her hands into her breast as if to stifle the fierce pain that was raging there. Hers was the grief that could not well be put in words. No name or adjective could do it justice.

She tottered on, and after a few steps stopped to

look back. The tall house loomed up forbidden against the sky. There was still a light in the nursery.

Someone was moving about. A figure was sharply outlined on the drawn window shade. It was not the figure of a man, but that of a woman. Marie stared, her breath coming in gasps.

"Thank God, Annie is with them," she murmured. "At least my babies will be tenderly cared for."

There was a grain of comfort in that knowledge for the heart-broken woman and mother. But it could not stifle her intense longing. Sob after sob rose to her lips.

Finally she turned away, despair eating into her vitals. It was not easy to battle down the desire to demand what was so brutally denied her.

Fear of the outcome of such a step dominated her. At the gate through which she passed, she paused. It was frightfully hard to go and leave her babies behind.

With her teeth set and her mind in a mad whirl, she toiled bravely on. She did not know where she was going. It mattered little. She was tempted to end it all in the lake to her right. It wouldn't take long. She recalled hearing someone say that drowning was not an unpleasant death.

An irresistible force drew her on. At the brink of the lake she paused. She closed her eyes and began to sway back and forth.

Then, suddenly, she seemed to collapse. She was on her knees sobbing.

Out on the placid water appeared a vision. It came closer and closer. A handsome little boy was leading a sweet-faced baby girl by the hand. Reproach and pain were mirrored in their young eyes.

"God—oh, God, help me!" Marie prayed. "Give me strength to resist the demon that calls me. I must

live—I must, for the sake of my children!"

With a new determination she rose to her feet, and hastily left the spot of danger. It was a twenty minute walk to the nearest traction line going to Chicago.

The physical exertion helped clear her mind, and she was once more able to think clearly and rationally.

Fortunately she had a small fortune of her own. At least she had the means of contesting the inevitable divorce. But no, she did not want to contest it. She was perfectly willing that Philip should have his freedom if he wanted it.

She could not go back to him even if he came to her and implored pardon on his knees.

He had killed her love for him with his insane jealousy, his horrible suspicion and hideous charge. But Marie vowed with all her heart and soul that he should not have the children.

The immediate problem confronting her was that of finding shelter for the night and a temporary home. There was her aunt in Cincinnati and another aunt lived in Boston. Both of them were prim old maiden ladies. Neither of them would welcome her as a discarded wife. Marie was sure of that.

Her only other living relative was her sister Julia Carey, the actress. But Julia was traveling with a road company somewhere in the far West.

Marie decided to live at one of the city hotels for the present, although being among utter strangers in her distress was not pleasant.

She reached Chicago at a late hour and went at once to the Hotel Sherman. But once alone within the four walls of the room assigned to her, she broke down again and wept scalding tears.

"Oh, I could forgive him anything except his cruel

refusal to let me see little Harry and Phyllis," she moaned as she paced back and forth. "It was heartless."

Until nearly morning she brooded over her unhappy predicament, then finally went to bed and fell into a fitful sleep.

The first thing she did after she rose and had her breakfast, was to call up Mr. Shields, a prominent attorney, and a friend of her departed father.

He was surprised to hear her tear-choked voice over the telephone. He was amazed when she told him that she must see him at once, and why.

"That is almost unbelievable," he answered. "You must not think about a divorce. No doubt the matter can be adjusted in some way. Philip is impulsive and headstrong. Come to my office at eleven o'clock, Mrs. Gordon, and we will talk things over and see what can be done."

"You evidently misunderstood me, Mr. Shields," Marie said in a clear voice. "It is my husband who will institute divorce proceedings, and I want the children. You must help me get them."

"Come to my office at eleven," the lawyer repeated, and hung up the receiver.

Marie dressed leisurely and sauntered toward La Salle Street. The clock in the front facade of the Board of Trade building struck the hour when she entered the tall office structure.

She was quite calm, and determination was marked in her step and the expression of her eyes.

Mr. Shields greeted her kindly and at once ushered her into his private sanctorum. After a few preliminary remarks of a personal nature, he broached the subject his fair client had come to discuss.

She told her side of the story, while the old lawyer listened attentively and sympathetically.

"I have looked long and vainly for a girl of your type," he continued with warm enthusiasm. "I have always wanted to transfer my ideal American girl on canvass. Well, my dream is going to come true with your help."

R. of M. G., No. 7.

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"You'll help me, won't you?" she ended, a tear glistening at her lashes.

"Of course, I'll take your case, although I am not particularly fond of appearing in the court of domestic relations," he announced as Marie finished speaking. "I'll do it because you are Henry Carey's daughter. Your father was one of my closest and most loyal friends."

"I thank you," she murmured. "And you will get my children for me? Oh, I know you will. I am their mother."

"That is something I can not promise positively," Mr. Shields said somewhat dubiously. "As the matter stands now, it will not be an easy thing to accomplish. Appearances are against you. But you may rest assured that I will do my very best, my dear Mrs. Gordon."

"You are the only man in all this world who can help me, dear Mr. Shields."

"As I said before, I'll do my very best, Marie."

The latter swallowed a few times and dobbed her eyes with a fine lace handkerchief.

"I—I don't know what I'll do if I don't get my babies," she said with a convulsive heaving of her breast. "I could not live without them, Mr. Shields."

He patted her arm encouragingly.

"I can well understand how your mother heart must yearn for them," he replied, genuine compassion in his voice. "Now I want you to be as cheerful as you can. And above all things, do not worry about the children. They are in good hands.

"Have no communication with your husband. Let him file his suit and we'll take care of our end. By the way," he added after a moment's thought, "are you staying at the Hotel Sherman indefinitely?"

"Yes, I think so," Marie responded. "I have no living relatives with whom I could make my home ex-

cept an aunt in Cincinnati, and she has gone on a trip through the West. I do wish I had someone close. The waiting and the suspense will be dreadful. I don't know how I am going to stand it."

After a moment of thought she added:

"Of course, I have another aunt, but she never liked me. And besides, she lives too far away. Then there is my sister Julia. You remember her, don't you, Mr. Shields?"

"Yes, I remember her very well," the latter assented with a vigorous nod.

"If I knew where Julia was right now, I'd join her," Mrs. Gordon declared hopelessly. "But I don't. The last I heard of her, she was with a road show and headed for Omaha, Nebraska. I am really sorry, for she'd be the right companion for me. Julia was always so jolly and carefree."

Mr. Shields was drumming on his desk, his brows wrinkled in deep reflection.

"Why don't you look for some sort of occupation while you are waiting for the case to come up in court," he suggested. "Nothing could be better for you, Mrs. Gordon."

"But what can I do?" she asked tremulously. "I am not qualified for office work, and department stores are——"

"Get a position as governess in some private home," the lawyer interrupted quickly. "Having children about you will help to keep you from worrying. Right now solitude is bad for you. I know what it will mean for you to be left alone."

"You are right," she acquiesced. "Having even other people's youngsters around me will help. I'll try to get such a position at once."

"Do so by all means," Mr. Shields urged.

Continued in next number

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